

F A B L E S

WITCHES
3 of 5



VERTIGO

Dec 09

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mature readers
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WILLINGHAM • BUCKINGHAM • LEIALOHA

SOME DAYS PAST...

THEY JUST
LAUGHED AT ME AND
WANDERED OFF!

I WAS
HUMILIATED!

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BABA YAGA

CHAPTER THREE OF WITCHES

EMBARRASSED
BEYOND HOPE OF
ENDURANCE!

STILL, THEY'RE
LOOSE AND AT LARGE
SOMEWHERE WITHIN THE
DEEP AND DARK CORNERS
OF THE BUSINESS
OFFICE.

A GREAT
AND POWERFUL *WITCH*,
ANGERED BY LONG MONTHS
OF CONFINEMENT, AND A
CAPRICIOUS *D'JINN* FREE OF
HIS OWN IMPRISONMENT
AFTER THE PASSING
OF AGES.

FOR ALL THEIR
TERRIBLE POWER, THEY
CAN'T GET OUT OF HERE ANY
MORE THAN *WE* CAN, BUFKIN,
WHICH ISN'T GOOD NEWS
FOR ANYONE.



THEY'RE **TRAPPED** WITH US. AND THOUGH THE CORRIDORS IN BACK ARE LONG AND TWISTED, CHANCES ARE WE'LL ENCOUNTER THEM AGAIN.

IF NOT THIS MONTH, THEN THE NEXT, OR THE ONE AFTER THAT.

WE CAN'T SIMPLY HOPE TO AVOID THEM IN THE FUTURE. WE HAVE TO **DO** SOMETHING ABOUT THEM--SOMETHING PERMANENT.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN "WE," MIRROR?

IN THIS LIFE, IN THIS INCARNATION, I'M LIMITED TO FARSEEING AND ADVICE. I CAN'T ACT DIRECTLY. FOR BETTER OR WORSE, YOU'RE OUR ONLY POSSIBLE **CHAMPION**.

I CAN INFORM AND GUIDE YOU, BUFGIN, BUT YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HAS TO TAKE UP ARMS AND **DEFEAT** THEM.



ME?!

BUT I CAN'T DO **NOTHING!** YOU SAW THAT ALREADY!

I'M ONLY A SILLY, HELPLESS MONKEY! THEY JUST **LAUGHED** AT ME AND WANDERED OFF!

YOU'RE **FAR** FROM HELPLESS, MY FRIEND. THEY MAY HAVE THE RAW POWER, SO YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO COUNTER THAT WITH INTELLECT, KNOWLEDGE, AND CUNNING.

YOU HAVE READ ALMOST EVERY BOOK IN OUR LIBRARY. HIGH TIME TO FINALLY PUT THAT VAST WEALTH OF INFORMATION TO **USE**.

AND YOU'VE GOT **FRIENDS** HERE. RALLY THEM.

LEAD US.





WORLDS DISTANT...

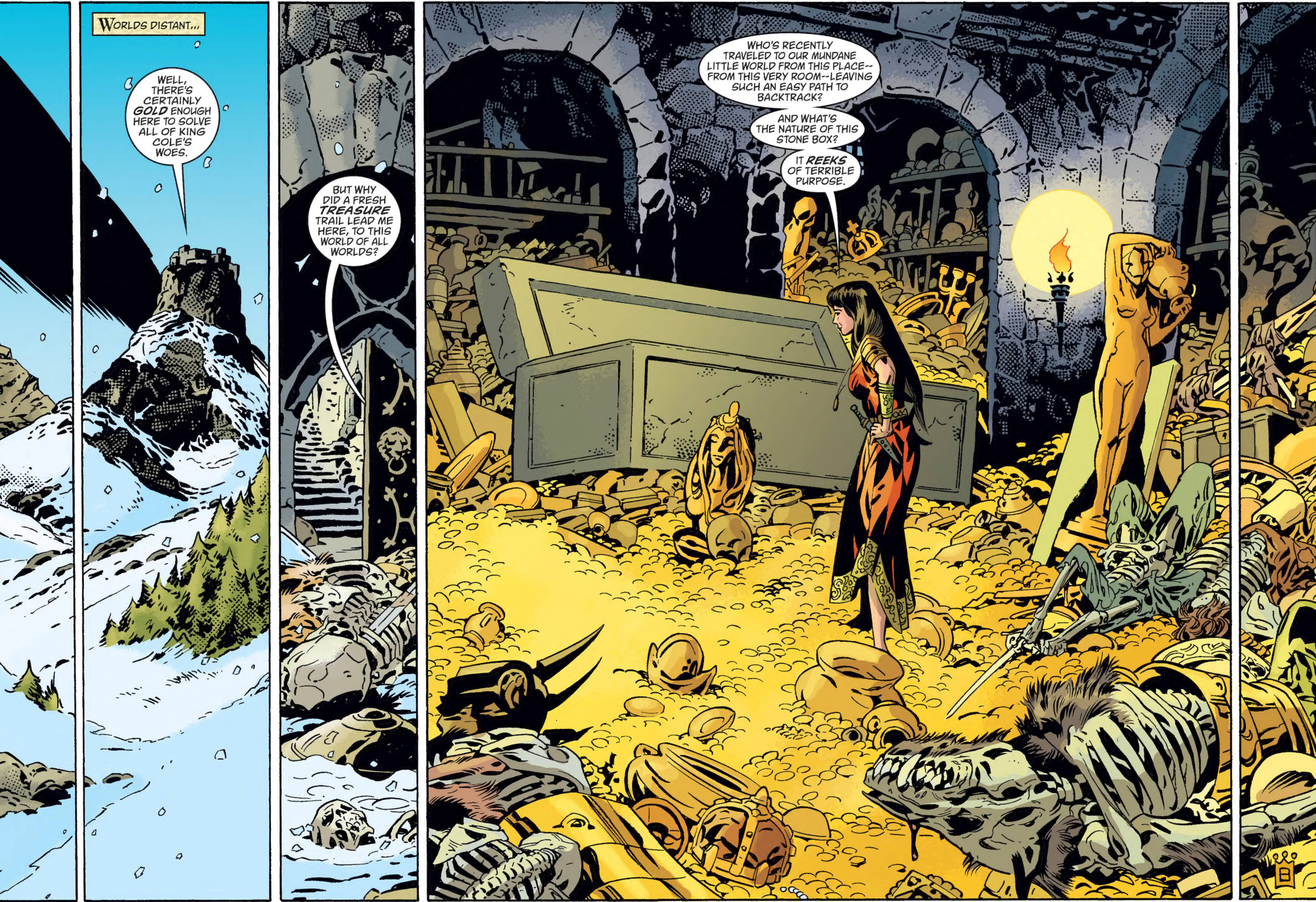
WELL, THERE'S CERTAINLY GOLD ENOUGH HERE TO SOLVE ALL OF KING COLE'S WOES.

BUT WHY DID A FRESH TREASURE TRAIL LEAD ME HERE, TO THIS WORLD OF ALL WORLDS?

WHO'S RECENTLY TRAVELED TO OUR MUNDANE LITTLE WORLD FROM THIS PLACE-- FROM THIS VERY ROOM-- LEAVING SUCH AN EASY PATH TO BACKTRACK?

AND WHAT'S THE NATURE OF THIS STONE BOX?

IT REEKS OF TERRIBLE PURPOSE.



SOME DAYS AGO...

WELL, AFTER DAYS OF PAINSTAKING RESEARCH, IT SEEMS TO ME THE FIRST THING TO DO IS **SEPARATE** THE TWO REMAINING THREATS SO WE CAN DEAL WITH THEM ONE AT A TIME.

THAT MAKES SENSE, RIGHT?

SO HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT FINDING THE WANDERING **GENI** WITHOUT RUNNING ACROSS THE WANDERING WICKED WITCH FIRST?

ANYONE GOT ANY **IDEAS** ON THAT?

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GENTLEMEN?

ANYONE?



WELL...
HERE'S THE THING, BUFKIN...



YOU'VE BEEN AWFULLY GOOD TO US THESE PAST MONTHS.

YEAH, A REAL FIRST-CLASS PAL. WE REALLY LIKE YOU.



AND WE'VE NO LINGERING AFFECTION FOR BABA YAGA.

TOO TRUE! SHE'S SHOWN HERSELF TO BE A REAL WITCH--WITH A CAPITAL "B!" WE REALLY HATE HER!



SO WE'D HELP YOU, IF YOU COULD FIGURE OUT A WAY FOR US TO DO IT...

WITHOUT GETTING WHAT'S LEFT OF US PULPED AND SPLINTERED.



BECAUSE, BASICALLY, OUR HEADS ARE ALL WE HAVE LEFT.



AND WE DON'T THINK YOU'D STAND A TINKER'S CHANCE AGAINST A FULL D'JINN AND THEN BABA YAGA--NOT TOGETHER OR EVEN ONE AT A TIME.

SORRY, BUDDY.

YOU'D THINK I COULD COME UP WITH AN IDEA TO HELP, SINCE I AM A GENIUS.

ACCORDING TO RECENT TESTIMONY.

THE HUDSON RIVER, NEW JERSEY SHORELINE, NORTH OF HOBOKEN.

TODAY.

NO HEROICS, MRS. FINCH.

JUST ONE VERY HIGH FLIGHT OVER WHATEVER'S LEFT OF BULLFINCH STREET.



GET A GOOD LOOK AND COME BACK HERE. NO LINGERING OVER THE TARGET.



DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, BOYS. I'M NOT THE BRAVE TYPE.



ONE QUICK LOOK AND I'M GONE, BABY, GONE.



SO NOW WE WAIT.

YUP, THE HARDEST PART, IN MANY WAYS. I'D ALWAYS PREFER TO GO INTO DANGER MYSELF, RATHER THAN SEND SOMEONE ELSE.



SO HOW'S THE PREGNANCY GOING? BEAUTY STILL SICK IN THE MORNING?

LIKE THE WRATH OF AN ANGRY GOD.



FABLES HAVE ALWAYS HAD DIFFICULT PREGNANCIES, SINCE THE BUSINESS WITH MAX AND HIS SPANISH INFLUENZA INCIDENT.



I HAVE TO CONFESS, I'M SCARED.



WORK HARD, MY
WITHERLINGS.

YOU'VE NO
NEED OF REST, AND MY
PATIENCE ISN'T WITHOUT
LIMIT.

EVEN IN YOUR
WITHERED STATE, THERE
ARE STILL PUNISHMENTS
YOU WOULDN'T LIKE TO
ENDURE.

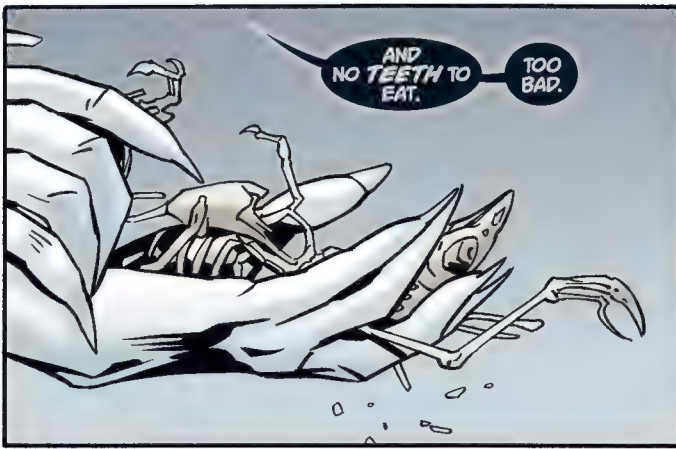




A WEE THING.



ALMOST NOTHING AT ALL.

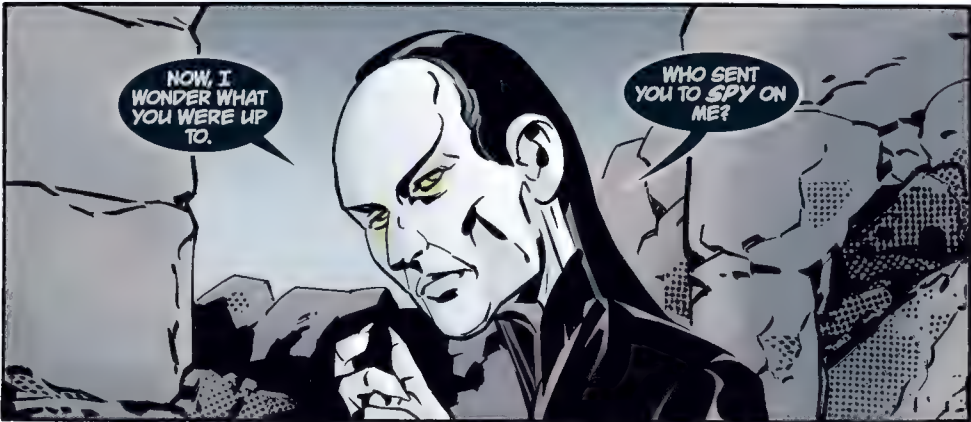


AND NO TEETH TO EAT.

TOO BAD.



NO LIFE-BEYOND-LIFE FOR YOU, POOR THING.



NOW, I WONDER WHAT YOU WERE UP TO.

WHO SENT YOU TO SPY ON ME?

A FEW DAYS AGO...

BONES OF DEMONS...

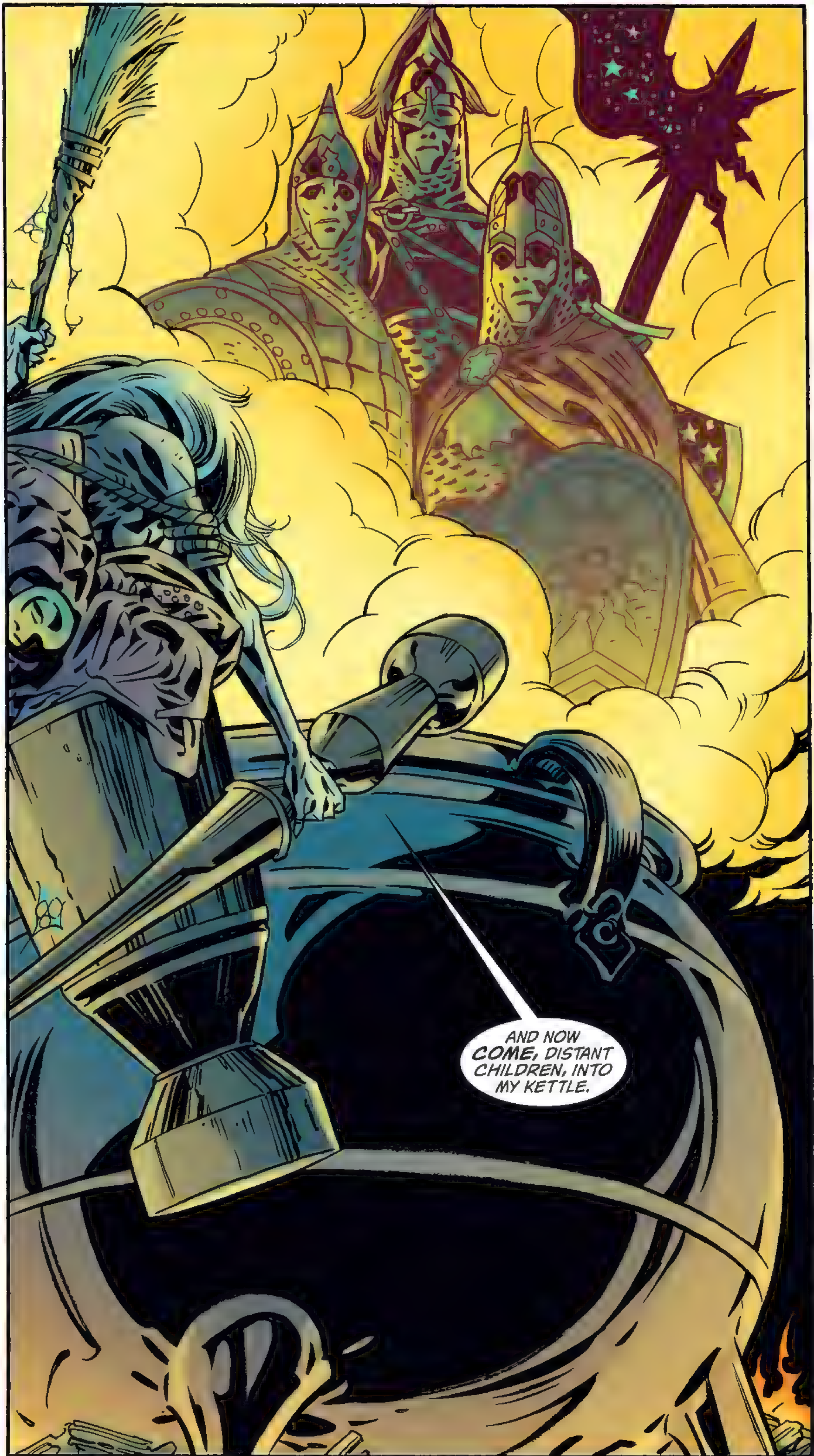
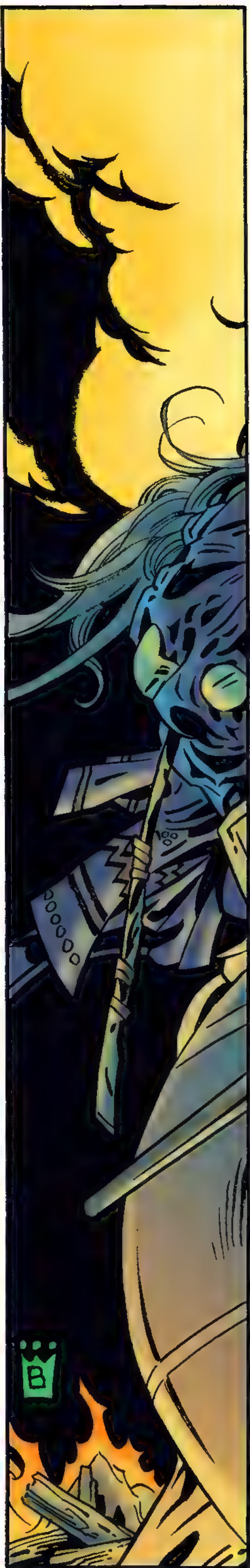
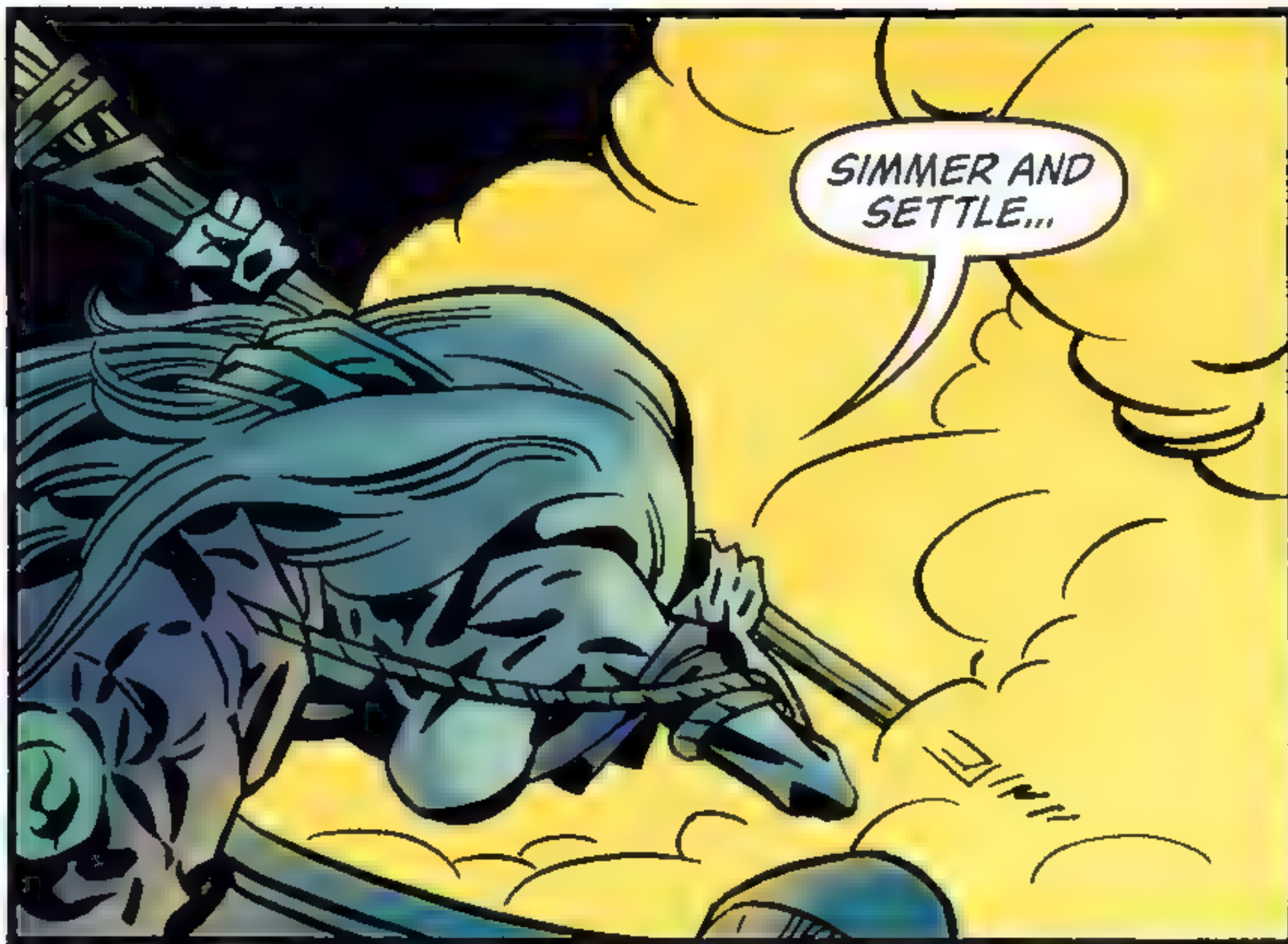
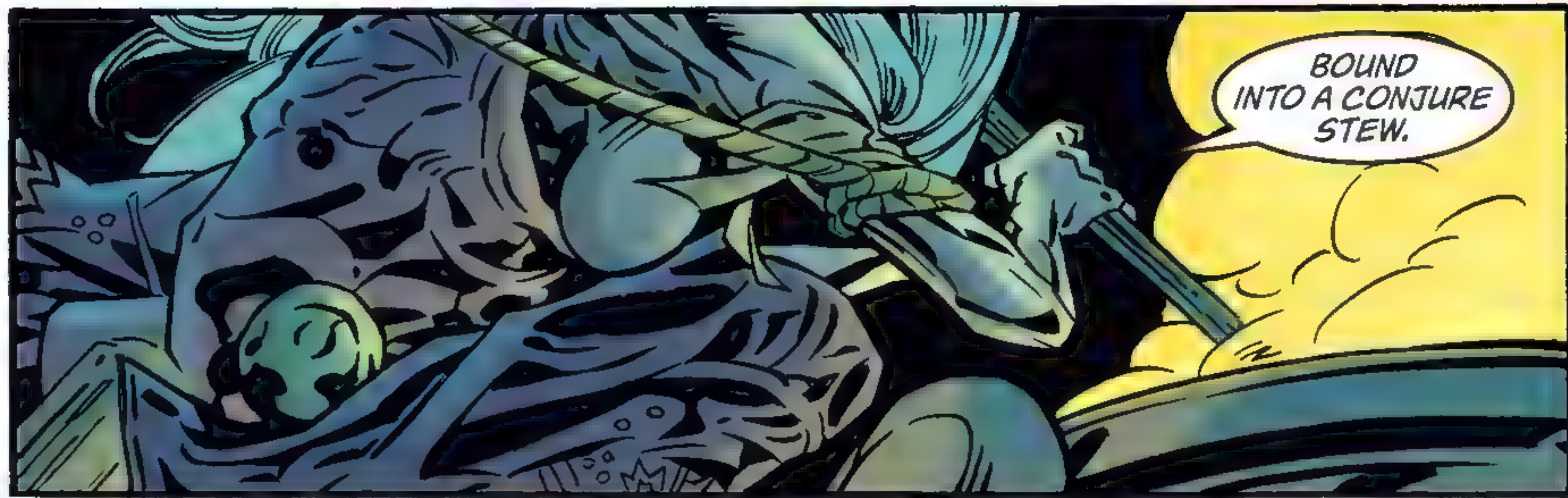
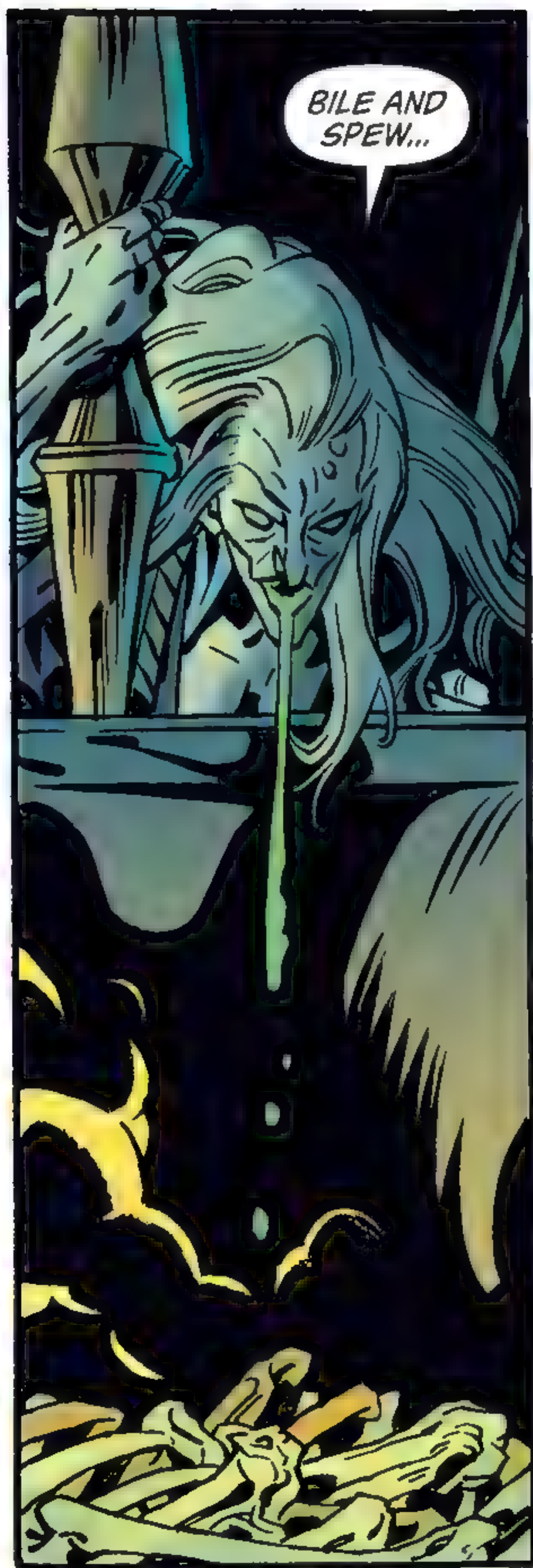
BILE AND SPEW...

BOUND INTO A CONJURE STEW.

COOK AND BUBBLE...

SIMMER AND SETTLE...

AND NOW COME, DISTANT CHILDREN, INTO MY KETTLE.



THE TREASURE
FORTRESS ON
THAT SO-DISTANT
WORLD...

TODAY.

AH, I
BEGIN TO *SEE*
NOW.

THIS WAS A
PANDORA'S BOX FOR
CONTAINING FELL
POWERS.

THERE
ARE MANY OF THESE,
SCATTERED THROUGHOUT
THE SCRAPS OF THE
FALLEN EMPIRE.

BROADCASTERS
OF MAGIC TO EMPOWER
STATE-SPONSORED
SORCERERS *UNWORTHY*
OF THE CRAFT.

AND OUR
MYSTERIOUS DARK
MAN RESIDED WITHIN
THIS ONE, UNTIL
RECENTLY.

SO WHO MAKES THESE
BOXES, I WONDER. DID HE
EVER CRAFT ONE TO
HOLD *ME*?

AND WHERE MIGHT
I *FIND* SUCH A GIFTED
PRACTITIONER?

AND WHY STORE
IT AMONG SUCH
COPIOUS TREASURES?
WAS ALL THIS GOLD
PART OF KEEPING HIM
CONTAINED?

A FEW SHORT DAYS AGO...

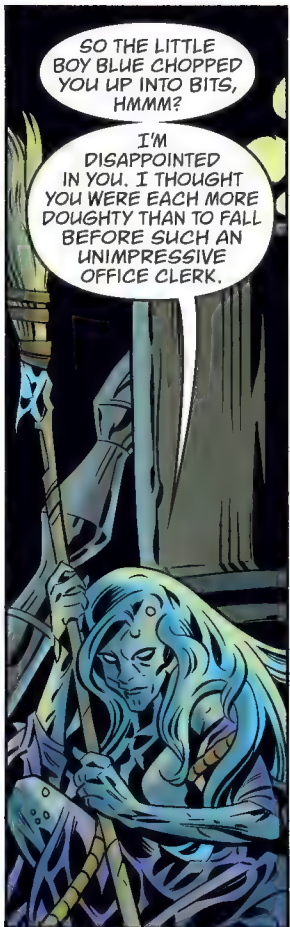
BRIGHT DAY, RADIANT SUN, AND DARK KNIGHT.

MY THREE DEAREST CHILDREN.



SO THE LITTLE BOY BLUE CHOPPED YOU UP INTO BITS, HMMM?

I'M DISAPPOINTED IN YOU. I THOUGHT YOU WERE EACH MORE DOUGHTY THAN TO FALL BEFORE SUCH AN UNIMPRESSIONING OFFICE CLERK.



HE WAS FORMIDABLE, HONORED MOTHER, AND POSSESSED OF GREAT AND TERRIBLE WEAPONS.

NEVER YOU MIND. YOU'RE EACH RESTORED AGAIN, IN BODY AND MIGHT.



AND I'LL DEAL WITH BOY BLUE. JUST ONE MORE REASON TO SETTLE OLD ACCOUNTS WITH HIM.

BUT THAT'S NOT WHY I CALLED YOU ACROSS THE WORLDS TO MY SIDE. OH NO, THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL.





FAN OUT,
MY LOVING SONS.
SERVE YOUR DEAR
OLD MOTHER.

FIND ME A
PASSAGWAY **OUT**
OF HERE.

YES,
MA'AM.



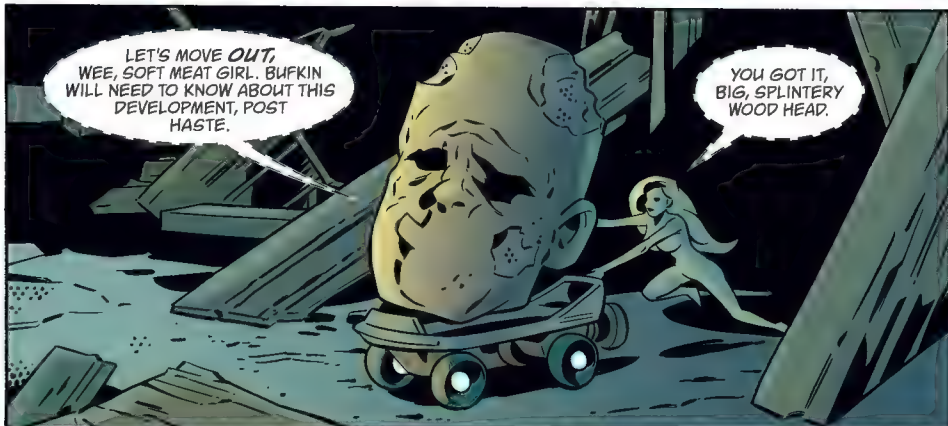
YOUR SMALLEST
DESIRE IS OUR SACRED
DUTY, MOTHER OF OUR
HEARTS AND SINEWS.



OUR LIVES
ARE YOURS TO ORDER.
OUR VERY ANIMATING
FORCE FLOWS FROM
YOUR POWER.



HMMM.



LET'S MOVE **OUT**,
WEE, SOFT MEAT GIRL. BUFKIN
WILL NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS
DEVELOPMENT, POST
HASTE.

YOU GOT IT,
BIG, SPLINTERY
WOOD HEAD.



SO THIS IS THE SITUATION, AS I SEE IT, MISTER GREAT AND POWERFUL GENII MAN.

YOU'RE FINALLY FREE FROM THE BOTTLE, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, ONLY TO FIND YOURSELF TRAPPED INSIDE A SLIGHTLY **BIGGER** BOTTLE--THE WOODLAND BUSINESS OFFICE.

AND YOU CAN'T SEEM TO FIND YOUR WAY OUT.

TRUE.

I AM TOO USED TO EMPLOYING MY GREAT POWERS IN SERVICE TO **OTHERS**. I'VE BEEN TOO THOROUGHLY CONDITIONED.

LEARNING HOW TO USE THEM ONCE AGAIN IN MY **OWN** INTEREST WILL TAKE SOME TIME AND PRACTICE.

B



BUT YOU'RE IMPATIENT. UNDERSTANDABLE. WHY SHOULD YOU HAVE TO DEFER FREEDOM A MOMENT LONGER? YOU SHOULDN'T.

I CAN HELP YOU IN THAT, BECAUSE I DON'T WANT YOU TO BE STUCK HERE ANY MORE THAN YOU DO.



WE CAN BE OF HELP TO EACH OTHER, AND HISTORICALLY, THAT'S THE ONLY BASIS FOR A TRUSTWORTHY ALLIANCE.

JUST GET BACK IN YOUR BOTTLE FOR ONE SECOND AND I'LL RELEASE YOU.

WHY WOULD I EVER AGREE TO DO SUCH A THING?



BECAUSE THEN YOU'LL BE OBLIGATED TO GRANT ME THREE WISHES. AND FOR MY FIRST WISH, I'LL COMMAND YOU TO FIND US BOTH A WAY OUT OF HERE.

THAT WAY YOUR SUPER MAGIC POWERS WILL KICK IN AND WE'LL BOTH BE FREE, BECAUSE THAT'S HOW YOUR SUPER MAGIC POWERS WORK, RIGHT?



THEN I'LL WISH FOR RICHES.

THEN I'LL WISH FOR A HAREM OF HOT FLYING MONKEY BABES, OF COURSE.



AND THEN, HAVING WASTED ALL THREE WISHES WITHOUT WISHING YOU BACK INTO THE BOTTLE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO GO YOUR OWN WAY, FINALLY FREE OF ALL RESTRAINTS, FOR ALL TIME.

INCLUDING ME, THE BOTTLE AND THIS LABYRINTH.



BUT HOW DO I KNOW THIS ISN'T A TRICK? HOW CAN I BE CERTAIN YOU'D RELEASE ME, ONCE I REENTERED MY BOTTLE?

BECAUSE I'M JUST A DUMB MONKEY WITHOUT GUILT. I COULDN'T PLAY A TRICK ON A BIG, POWERFUL CREATURE LIKE YOU IF I WANTED TO.



TRUE. YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY A SIMPLE CREATURE.

AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF DECEIVING ME, ONCE I DID GET FREE OF THE BOTTLE, WOULD BE TERRIBLE INDEED FOR YOU.



RIGHT. MY OWN NATURAL COWARDICE MAKES ME THE MOST TRUSTWORTHY OF ALL ALLIES.

I AGREE TO YOUR BOLD PLAN, LITTLE ONE.



LET US PROCEED.



GOTCHA!



I'VE GOT THE GENII BOTTLED AGAIN. HOW'S THE SURVEILLANCE ON BABY YUGGOTH GOING?

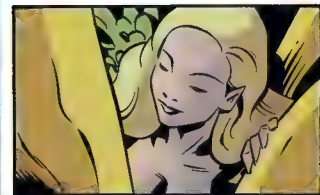
IT'S BABA YAGA.

AND HOW MANY MORE BARLEYCORN GIRLS HAVE HATCHED OUT OF THE MAGIC TULIPS?



THREE MORE SINCE THIS MORNING, BRINGING OUR TOTAL CROP SO FAR UP TO...

LET'S SEE--CARRY THE TWO...



HOW SOON WILL YOU FREE HIM?

HUH? FREE WHO?

THE GENII.




SO YOU CAN DO THE THREE WISHES YOU SAID YOU'D PROMISE TO DO.

ARE YOU *INSANE*? NEVER!



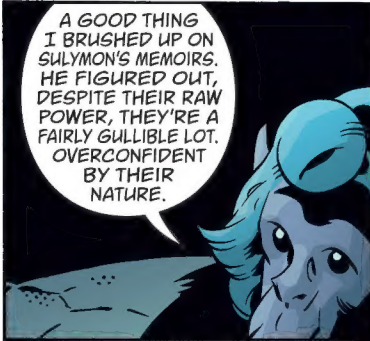
DIDN'T YOU EVER NEVER READ BURTON'S *COMPREHENSIVE TREATISE ON D'JINNS, EFRITS AND BOTTLE DEMONS*, THIRD EDITION?

THEY'RE **MONSTERS**, THROUGH AND THROUGH!



THEY'RE WAY TOO POWERFUL TO ALLOW OUTSIDE OF THEIR BOTTLES. NOT FOR ANY REASON!


WE'RE INCREDIBLY LUCKY I WAS ABLE TO TRICK THIS ONE BACK INTO HIS BOTTLE, SINCE THEY CAN'T BE FORCED.



A GOOD THING I BRUSHED UP ON SULYMON'S MEMOIRS. HE FIGURED OUT, DESPITE THEIR RAW POWER, THEY'RE A FAIRLY GULLIBLE LOT. OVERCONFIDENT BY THEIR NATURE.



IT'S HOW HE GOT THEM ALL BOTTLED THE **FIRST** TIME.



SO WHAT'S OUR NEXT MOVE, BUFKIN?




FEEL FREE TO CALL ME **GENERAL** BUFKIN. THIS IS A MILITARY OPERATION, AFTER ALL, AND I AM YOUR COMMANDER IN THE FIELD.

BUT OUR NEXT MOVE SEEMS OBVIOUS. WE NEED TO DEFEAT THE WITCH.

AND SINCE SHE WON'T BE BESTED THROUGH TRICKERY, WE NEED TO DO IT WITH **MASSIVE MARTIAL MIGHT**.



GOOD ALLITERATION.



MOUNT UP, TROOPS! IT'S TIME TO TAKE THE BATTLE TO THE ENEMY! LET'S END THIS, ONCE AND FOR ALL!



YOU KNOW, BABA YAGA, IT REALLY DOESN'T HELP YOU TO BE CONSTANTLY **SMASHING** ME THE WAY YOU DO. YOU CAN'T DESTROY ME PERMANENTLY, AND IT **DOES** GET ANNOYING.

THEN **SERVE** ME. TELL ME WHAT I **DEMAND** TO KNOW.



FINE. IF YOU INSIST.

THOUGH IT WOULDN'T HAVE KILLED YOU TO PUT YOUR DEMANDS IN A **RHYME**.



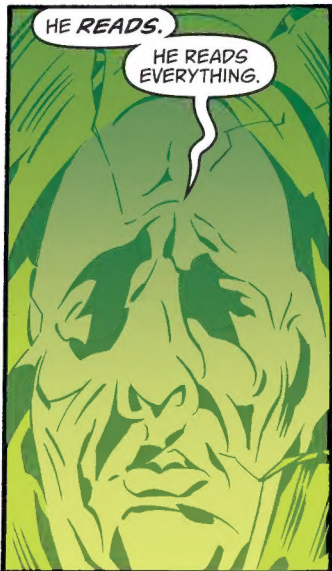
YOU CAN NEVER FIND YOUR WAY OUT OF THIS PLACE. IT'S ITS OWN ENCLOSED REALM. AND IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYWAY, BECAUSE YOU'LL LIKELY BE **DEAD** SOON.

WHAT? HOW?



YOU'VE MANAGED TO MAKE AN ENEMY OF BUFKIN, THE MONKEY. ONCE HE DECIDED HE NEEDED TO DESTROY YOU, YOU WERE BASICALLY **DOOMED**.

I'VE NEVER HEARD OF SUCH A CREATURE. WHAT ARE HIS POWERS?



HE **READS**.

HE **READS** EVERYTHING.

NEXT: THE WITCH GOES TO WAR!

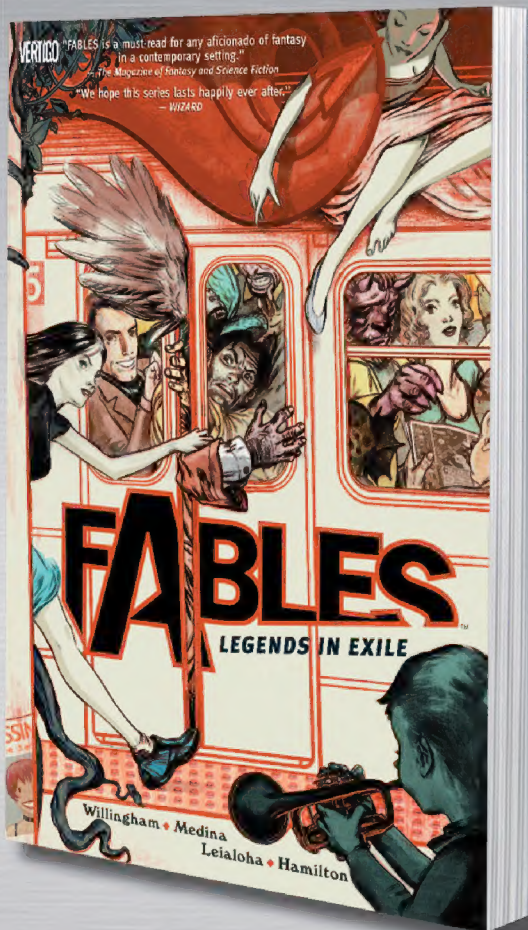
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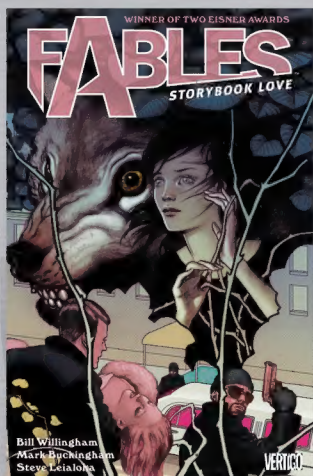
"[A] wonderfully twisted concept... features fairy tale characters banished to the noirish world of present-day New York."
– THE WASHINGTON POST



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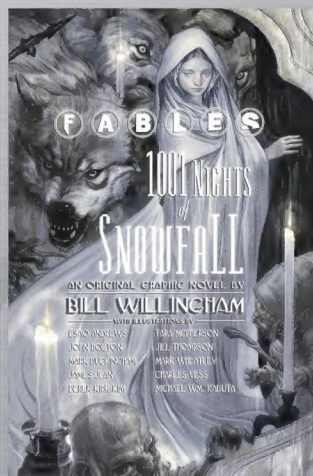
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